

Threatening to gang-rape is not just vile, it’s a crime



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

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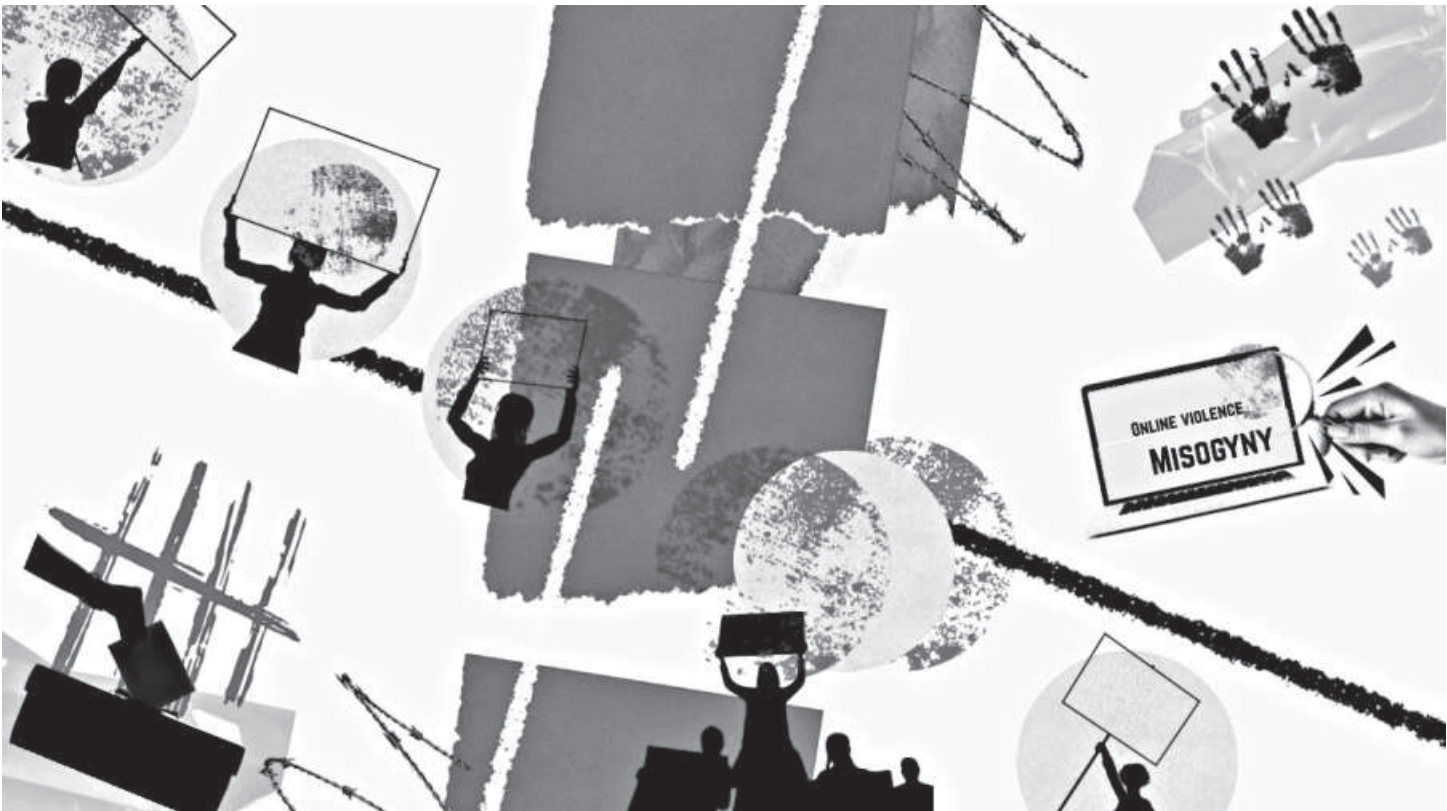
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

A Dhaka University student has been suspended for six months for advocating online that a female student, a candidate in the upcoming Dhaka University Central Students’ Union (DUCSU) elections, be “gang-raped.” His dangerous comment drew some like-minded individuals (read potential rapists) to agree with him and make the same statement.

Ali Husen’s Facebook status threatened to organise a “march for gang rape” against BM Fahmida Alam, who represents the left-leaning panel “Aparajeyo ‘71, Odommo ‘24”, because she had filed a writ petition against the nomination of SM Farhad, a general secretary candidate from the Islami Chhatra Shibir-backed United Student Alliance.

Following her writ petition, the High Court on September 1 stayed the DUCSU election process until October 30. However, an hour later, the Appellate Division’s chamber judge overturned the stay order. This was when Husen posted his disgusting status that encouraged others to join in the misogynistic parade.

It would be easy to dismiss this as a one-off incident in which a male student expressed anti-woman sentiments, but we all know that it is far more complex and insidious than that. Ali Husen was using an age-old weapon to humiliate and “cancel” a young woman for daring to challenge a man, even having the audacity to stand as a candidate. Many students might have been angry that Fahmida had filed the writ petition, which could result in the postponement of the DUCSU elections. But embedded in a threat of sexual violence involving multiple rapes is a subtle design to



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

create an environment that would remove women from the public sphere, in this case from an election.

This attempt to “invisibilise” women from public forums has become a common trend advocated by rightist groups. The

venom spewed by various religion-based groups against the Women’s Affairs Reform Commission, calling for its disbandment and hurling abuses at its members, was enough proof of the “political will” to make sure women’s place in society remains unequal and marginalised. More disappointing was the total silence from the interim government led by a known champion of women’s empowerment and which has at least

three women advisers who are well-known feminists. During the National Consensus Commission’s laborious dialogues with the country’s political parties, the reform proposals of the Women’s Affairs Reform Commission were conspicuously kept out

of the discussions. So were women—not a single one was seen in the photographs or video footage of the discussion sessions. Perhaps because it was obvious that most of the proposals would be met by vehement opposition. When it came to women’s reserved seats, all parties agreed that the existing 50 seats would be kept and that they would keep five percent of nominations for women in the next elections. Oh, what HUGE

concessions to half of the population! Should we, the lowly women, all jump with joy? Oh, sorry, not allowed.

In the field, women student leaders of the July uprising were sidelined either by being kept out of the forums or parties (except for

a token few) or through more malignant strategies—by attacking them online with fake images, lies, and direct threats. Men have physically assaulted women on a launch, in the streets, on campus, and on the beach, all in the name of moral policing. The recent violent attacks on Chittagong University students by locals was sparked by the alleged assault of a female student by the security guard of the building she lived in because she had come home late, after 11pm. According to her, when she tried to enter through the gate of the building, the guard shoved and kicked her. On Monday, a female student of Jahangirnagar University was pushed off a moving bus by the helper as soon as she mentioned the name of her university as her destination. Women pursuing higher studies seem to be an irritant for some, triggering violent acts. It is as if there is a systematic strategy to just remove women from all public spaces.

Thus, for Ali Husen and his kind, threatening to “gang rape” a woman does not seem to be a crime, which it definitely is. It is a way to “teach unruly women a lesson,” to hopefully erase them from the public sphere.

His six-month suspension as punishment is shocking. Do the university authorities think that after six months he will stop believing that gang rape is justified in certain circumstances? Is there any guarantee that he or his followers will not post such statuses or even follow through with these threats? Did anyone think of the security of Fahmida and other female students who may now be targeted by Ali Husen’s fans?

Threatening sexual violence is nothing less than a crime. It constitutes “criminal intimidation to cause injury or grievous hurt” (under Penal Code, 1860), and is also an offence under the Cyber Protection Ordinance, 2025. There is no scope to take such threats lightly. From January to July this year, 123 gang rapes were reported in Bangladesh, according to Ain o Salish Kendra. This man and anyone else who publicly post or air such statements must be taken into custody and punished under the law. Most importantly, they should not be garlanded and cheered for their criminal act.

The uneasy geometry of US-China-India-Russia relations



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The just-concluded Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, held in Tianjin, China from August 31 to September 1, was crafted as a spectacle. Chinese President Xi Jinping, flanked by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, sent a clear message that Beijing intends to redefine the balance of global power. Xi’s call for “true multilateralism” and a “Global Governance Initiative” was an unmistakable swipe at Washington and its post-World War II dominance. The setting and choreography echoed an old ambition: to create a counterweight to US influence by deepening ties across Eurasia and the Global South. Yet, beneath the theatre, the summit only reinforced a reality highlighted by decades of history and scholarship: great powers cooperate where convenient but hedge relentlessly, and every relationship is laced with tension (and obviously, complexity).

The SCO has grown quietly since its founding by China, Russia, and Central Asian states over two decades ago, with India’s accession in 2017 giving it additional credibility. Beijing used the summit to roll out proposals that could redraw parts of the global order, including an SCO development bank, AI research hubs, and new financial assistance packages. Xi invited member-states to join China’s lunar exploration efforts and promised over \$1.6 billion in combined

loans and grants. These initiatives underline Beijing’s intent to construct parallel systems—finance, technology, and space partnerships—that give states options outside US-centric frameworks. Russia and India, both managing Western pressure in different ways, see these alternatives as leverage rather than loyalty pledges.

Still, the SCO’s rising profile does not make it a cohesive bloc. History cautions against reading too much unity into summit photographs. Odd Arne Westad’s *The Cold War: A World History* and Henry Kissinger’s *World Order* show how triangular diplomacy—from Richard Nixon’s opening to China in 1971 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907—was always about balance, not alliance. The Tianjin meeting fits this tradition: a forum where powers that often distrust one another explore cooperation under pressure, much like how the US and UK abruptly realigned financial leverage during the 1956 Suez Crisis. The Tianjin summit offered both symbolism and substance, but neither changed the competitive undertones shaping the participants’ strategies.

Energy is the core of today’s geopolitical geometry. Russian oil, discounted since the Ukraine war, has become a crucial piece of India’s economic puzzle. Despite temporary disruptions caused by sanctions compliance and narrowing discounts, Russian crude

still accounts for roughly a third of India’s energy imports. Indian refiners exploit market arbitrage, blending Russian supplies to manage domestic prices without breaching sanctions outright. This trade relies on shadow fleets, reflagged tankers, and insurance arrangements routed through Dubai and Hong Kong—systems that thrive in legal grey zones. The set-up shows how politics and markets are interconnected: Washington can tighten sanctions, raising risk premiums, but energy flows rarely stop; they simply reroute.

Overlaying this is Washington’s tariff and tech-control strategy, which has evolved into an informal industrial policy. In 2024, the US raised Section 301 tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, semiconductors, and renewable energy products, and by mid-2025, similar tools were being used to discourage Russian energy dealings. These moves don’t completely sever trade but force companies and governments to calculate the political cost of every shipment. Each deal now comes with a compliance surcharge, illustrating Zbigniew Brzezinski’s *The Grand Chessboard* in a new form: supply chains and financial systems, rather than military bases, are the contested terrain.

India’s posture is central to this geometry. As Ashley J Tellis argued in “India as a Leading Power,” New Delhi is determined to be neither an ally nor a junior partner, but a “leading power” in its own right. India simultaneously buys Russian oil, strengthens its defence ties with Washington, and hardens its technological base against China—all while keeping border tensions manageable, till the tariff hits hard. Tanvi Madan’s *Fateful Triangle* highlights how India’s strategic culture prizes autonomy, yet autonomy becomes harder to sustain when sanctions, tariffs, and export controls raise the costs of hedging. India’s challenge is to ensure that

the benefits of multi-alignment outweigh its risks, particularly in critical areas like semiconductors and telecommunications, especially IT, where US influence remains overwhelming.

The Sino-Russian partnership, while closer than at any point since the Cold War, is asymmetrical. Alexander Lukin’s *China and Russia: The New Rapprochement* explains how this dynamic was accelerating even before the Ukraine war: Moscow has leaned heavily on China for capital, technology, and diplomatic cover, and that dependence deepens with every pipeline and yuan-settled transaction. Beijing, meanwhile, calibrates its support carefully, avoiding steps that might provoke a devastating Western sanctions campaign. Graham Allison’s *Destined for War* offers context here: even rising powers willing to challenge the status quo often act cautiously to avoid triggering uncontrollable escalation.

These dynamics make the idea of a China-India-Russia “trilateral” misleading. While the SCO and BRICS create opportunities for coordination, none of these powers is willing to trade autonomy for alignment. Even Moscow, once the primary advocate for the RIC (Russia-India-China) format, now relies more on Beijing than on multilateral structures. New Delhi, scarred by its 2020 border clash with China, sees limited strategic upside in a bloc that could constrain its options. Practical cooperation is therefore limited to opportunistic deals—oil, fertilisers, payments corridors—rather than a cohesive strategy.

The US, for its part, is not aiming to sever every tie between these powers, but to control key chokepoints in finance, supply chains, and technology standards. By combining tariffs, export restrictions, and “friend-shoring” partnerships with Europe, Japan, South Korea, and Southeast Asia, Washington

is building resilience in sectors that Beijing could weaponise. The US strategy is not about crushing rivals outright, but about sustaining a favourable balance of power long enough to shape global rules.

Therefore, three scenarios illustrate the possible future paths. The first is “managed transactionalism,” where oil trades, payment systems, and diplomatic coordination persist without formal alliance commitments. The second is “tariff-tech bifurcation,” where intensified US sanctions and controls force India to reduce Russian energy dependence, accelerate supply chain splits, and raise costs globally. The third is “crisis compression,” triggered by a border skirmish or Taiwan incident, which would sharply polarise choices and push Moscow closer to Beijing while disrupting global markets. Historical precedents from Kissinger’s diplomacy to Westad’s Cold War analysis remind us how quickly crises can redraw alignments and understandings.

What Tianjin revealed most clearly is that 21st century geopolitics is shaped less by ideological blocs and more by overlapping bargains. India’s energy imports will shift only when discounts no longer offset risks. China will keep Moscow afloat, but on terms that reinforce Beijing’s leverage. Russia will trade pride for survival if necessary, while the US will tolerate some trade flows as long as it controls key technologies and financial arteries. Sanctions increasingly resemble tariffs. Tariffs act like standards, and standards decide who reaps future profits.

Far from a united anti-US front, this is a world of transactional diplomacy where every major power maintains quiet understandings with Washington, even as they challenge it. The SCO summit was a vivid reminder that summitry can project power but cannot erase the structural interdependence at the heart of global politics.

CROSSWORD BY
THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
1 Stand up
6 Kathy of “Misery”
11 Abate
12 Media mogul Winfrey
13 Grassy expanses
14 Get more out of
15 Can. neighbor
16 Rink makeup
18 Needle feature
19 Uno doubled
20 Young fellow
21 Cargo unit
22 Inflamm with love
24 Swindles
25 Action movie sound
27 School event
29 Choice word
32 Summer sign
33 Butter unit
34 Outback bird
35 Lend a hand
36 Letter after zeta
37 Bar staple
38 Mumbai’s nation
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4 Day light
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6 Yawning, perhaps
7 Clumsy one
8 Song by Ice Cube
9 Hardly strict with
10 Glosses
17 Child’s place when traveling
23 Silent
24 Guest’s bed
26 Ready to work
27 Lament
28 Director Rob
30 “8 Mile” rapper
31 Become depleted
33 Ogre
39 Tax agcy.
41 PC-linking system

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TUESDAY’S ANSWERS

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